

WORLD

Volunteers help push back racism

From coast to coast in US, ordinary people step in to ease Asians' fears

By CHINA DAILY

Thousands of volunteers have put themselves at the ready to escort people of Asian descent through the streets of New York City's Chinatown as fears of racist attacks deepen.

The volunteers, from a pool of almost 1,800, are walking with anyone requesting help to get them safely to their destination in Chinatown. They are meeting people at subway stations, bus stops and other places in the cultural and economic hub of the city's Chinese community.

A separate initiative pulls together volunteers for patrols of the district. Other cities in the US are seeing similar responses.

Peter Kerre, the founder of the Safewalks concept in New York, said he decided to call for volunteers to offer the walks after seeing photos of victims who had been badly beaten at subway stations.

"If someone comes up to you at the subway and says, 'Can I walk you home?', it's the last thing you want to hear," volunteer Luke Miller told PIX 11 NEWS. "So that's why we've been trying to be a consistent presence to show who we are to the community."

In New York, Chinatown Block Watch is the name of the group providing street patrols. It was formed at the outset of the pandemic in response to the rise in cases of har-

assment against Asian Americans.

Karlin Chan, a community-board member in his 60s, decided to put out a call for volunteer patrollers as the number of violent attacks against Asian New Yorkers increased dramatically on the then-empty streets across the neighborhood and the city.

Block Watch started with a handful of Chan's friends but now has 40 members. The group includes male and female volunteers, from their mid-20s to their mid-60s.

A recent report by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, showed that while hate crimes overall in the US had fallen slightly in 2020, crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders had jumped 149 percent.

'Comprehensive existence'

Zhao Lijian, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said on Tuesday that racism is a comprehensive, systematic and persistent existence in the US as white racists, neo-Nazis and members of the Ku Klux Klan openly use racist slogans to advocate white supremacy and incite racial discrimination and hatred.

In its history, the US committed unspeakable crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity of systematic ethnic cleansing and massacres against Native Americans. Violent law enforcement leads to frequent deaths of African



Volunteers with San Francisco's Chinatown Safety Patrol provide a reassuring presence in the district on March 23. JUSTIN SULLIVAN / GETTY IMAGES VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Americans, racial discrimination in the workplace is deeply rooted and social discrimination against ethnic minorities is widespread, he told a regular news conference.

"The US side should truly honor its commitment to protecting human rights, get tough with discrimination and hate violence against ethnic minorities, including Asian Americans, and earnestly protect the rights of ethnic minorities, so that they can get rid of the nightmare of discrimination and hate crimes and no longer live in fear," he said.

An assault on March 29 near New York City's Times Square in which a man kicked a 65-year-old immigrant from the Philippines multiple times was captured on video and went viral, further stoking fears about anti-Asian hate crimes.

The attacker knocked her to the ground in front of an apartment building, stomped on her face and shouted anti-Asian slurs including, "You don't belong here," police said. Police charged Brandon Elliot,

38, with felony assault as a hate crime.

New York City has deployed a team of undercover Asian police officers. Other major cities, from San Jose to Chicago, have boosted patrols in Asian neighborhoods and sought to forge closer ties with communities, some of which have sought to fill gaps the police can't fill.

Leanna Louie, who has organized residents to patrol San Francisco's Chinatown, said the city's police force of about 2,000 doesn't have the resources. "It's impossible," she said.

The rise in attacks so alarmed retired San Jose police officer Rich Saito that he added a patrol unit to a community group keeping watch over Japantown. Deluged by offers to help, Saito said he has trained 40 to 50 volunteers to walk the streets and report any suspicious activity.

"I'm very concerned about the safety of this community, especially the seniors," said Saito, who escorted police chief Anthony Mata on a tour of the neighborhood on Saturday. "The police department does

the best it can, but they can't be here all the time, every day."

Safety training

Dax Valdes, a senior trainer with the group Hollaback! in New York, told China Daily: "A lot of folks come to the training to learn how to be an ally, how to stand up for somebody else."

The group aims to end harassment by offering training, tools and strategies that are easily accessible to make people feel safe.

More than 4,000 people have signed up for the training since a mass shooting in Atlanta killed eight people in March, including six women of Asian descent, and nearly all April training sessions are full, the group said.

"The purpose of teaching everybody how to intervene is to prevent harassment from happening," Valdes said. "If we don't say something now, when are we going to say it?"

Minlu Zhang in New York and agencies contributed to this story.

Briefly

RUSSIA Putin signs law allowing him two more terms

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday signed a bill into law enabling the incumbent head of state to run for two more terms starting in 2024. The bill was approved by the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, and the upper house of parliament, the Federation Council, last month. The new elections law was made following constitutional amendments adopted in a nationwide referendum in July 2020. The new law grants Putin the possibility of starting his presidency from scratch in 2024 and holding the office until 2036.

SERBIA Vucic gets first shot of Sinopharm vaccine

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic rolled up his sleeve on Tuesday for his first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by Sinopharm. "I received the vaccine, and I feel great," Vucic said on social media after taking the jab in Majdanpek. "Thank you our great health workers. Thank you our Chinese brothers." Serbia has one of the highest inoculation rates in Europe, mainly thanks to the government's large purchases of the Chinese vaccine. It is also using the Russian Sputnik V vaccine and the vaccines developed by the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca partnerships.

NIGERIA 1,800 inmates escape after gunmen attack

More than 1,800 inmates escaped from a prison in the southeastern city of Owerri after an attack by gunmen carrying rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, explosives and rifles, the prisons authority said. Nigerian police said it believed a banned separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra, was behind the attack, but a spokesman for the group denied involvement. A comprehensive investigation is underway.

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